



かき木ネ!

~まっるね神々と神殺しの魔王~

III

A Set of Three...?

It was almost noon on a Saturday. Naturally, school was closed today.

Godou was visiting Nanao Shrine located in the city center.

"Athena and Kusanagi-san's battle... A week has already passed since then.."

Yuri spoke softly as she swept the confines of the shrine.

Wearing a miko's outfit consisting of a white robe with a red hakama, she was holding a bamboo broom in her hands. Mariya Yuri was the Hime-Miko who served her duties at Nanao Shrine, a member of the Hime-Miko organization which guarded Japan's sites of spiritual power.

"Ah yeah. Time really seems to fly."

Godou responded with deep feeling. He too, was sweeping the shrine territory with a bamboo broom.

Earlier, he had made an appointment with Yuri to meet here together with a third person. When he arrived at the shrine, he found the Hime-Miko in the middle of sweeping.

Because he felt it would be boring to hang around doing nothing while waiting for Yuri to finish her sweeping, Godou suggested he pitch in to help.

As a result, the two of them were doing the cleaning together.

The current season was early summer. An excellent time of the year when it was neither too hot nor too cold.

Also, the confines of the shrine were surrounded by a protective forest, giving it a sense of peace and quiet one would not associate with the city center. The air and breeze were also quite refreshing. A pleasant environment.

Nevertheless, the topic of conversation was not particularly cheerful between these two.

"The total damage from last time... Amakasu-san has made a rough estimate."

"Eh!?"

If possible, Godou did not wish to know. However, this was news that he had to hear no matter what.

Godou prepared himself. The whole reason why he arrived before the appointed time at Nanao Shrine was because he wanted to ask Yuri about this matter.

How far reaching were the effects of the battle?

"So how much was it...?"

"Y-Yes. Amakasu-san said the following in his usual manner--"

The words of the History Compilation Committee special agent.

'There is no way to calculate exactly, but a rough estimate would place economic losses at several tens of billions of yen. This is only an approximate figure for now, but in any case it should be in the ballpark.'

Going beyond frivolous, perhaps one could call his attitude as taking things rather philosophically.

Hearing Amakasu's comments recounted, Godou bowed his head dejectedly. Most likely, he was responsible for a fair percentage of that figure.

"I feel really sorry about this..."

"Kusanagi-san. Even if you apologize to me, it is completely meaningless."

"You're right... Sorry."

Yuri's troubled words sent Godou's mood further into depression.

However, he immediately thought of something instead. The people who are entitled to be depressed are the victims who suffered hardship as a result of the commotion. As one of the main culprits, what he should be doing is deep reflection and strict reminder to avoid doing something similar again.

In his mind he vowed never to cause another incident like that again!

Godou suddenly looked up and spoke to Yuri with great conviction of spirit.

"Mariya, I have a request. Could you use your usual attitude to scold me, and point out all the places I have done wrong!?"

"Eh?"

"Please. In order to prevent me from making the same mistakes. Let this stand as the resolve in my heart!"

"H-How could I... Suddenly requested by you like this..."

The prim and proper Yamato Nadeshiko said frantically, showing great indecision.

"Everything I wanted to convey to Kusanagi-san has basically been said to you last week already. By now, I do not believe there is any need to repeat them again."

Yuri expressed her opinion with a troubled expression. I see.

She was not only a dignified and stately high-class lady but also a Hime-Miko -- in accordance to this title of "Hime," she possessed a noble sense of responsibility. She was a precious friend who could courageously offer honest advice even in the face of the "Devil King" Kusanagi Godou.

She had already reprimanded him for several of his problematic behaviors during the battle against Athena.

Instead of resent, Godou felt thankful towards her instead.

Having become "the man who had slain a god" due to various reasons, Kusanagi Godou found himself being treated as king by many people even though he considered the status unsuited for him. In order to prevent himself from growing arrogant and straying into an improper path, he hoped that Yuri could advise and reprimand him whenever the opportunity arose.

Hence, Godou now stared straight into Yuri's eyes and requested her once again.

"Isn't there some kind of saying about healed scars and whatnot? I don't think that is something I'm capable of. No matter how many times you repeat yourself, I will accept all reprimands!"

"B-But Kusanagi-san. Based on your behavior, very clearly you are disposed towards 'forgetting the pain as soon as the scar is healed.' "

As Yuri spoke with hesitation, Godou groaned "Hmm."

"Indeed, I believe Kusanagi-san is an honest person. However, while you repeatedly regret and reflect on your past behavior, you keep making the same mistakes time and again. Ah, could it be true that--"

Yuri suddenly showed an expression as if she realized something.

Godou began to get nervous. After all, Yuri seemed to be a miko possessing spirit vision, which was something like clairvoyance. Reportedly, whenever she felt concerned, she often discerned the truth when all others were stumped.

For a girl like that to be suddenly surprised, surely it must be because she saw something.

"C-Could it be... You saw something?"

"I keep getting the feeling that Kusanagi-san does not reflect enough."

"Why?"

"Because you are too driven by emotion in those kinds of situations. Probably, despite knowing rationally you are wrong, you discard these notions when the raging flames in your heart flare up, recklessly rampaging on instantaneous impulse without any regard for plans--"

"!"

Looking back at his life up to this point, Godou did indeed recall many memories that fitted this description.

Godou became aware of the stiffening of his own expression. Seeing his reaction, Yuri frantically said:

"I-It is only just a feeling. I have no idea if I am right or not."

"N-No, your feelings are completely on target. Perhaps I really do have that kind of side to me."

Godou muttered gloomily.

"My little sister at home often says that the men in my family always acted in this fashion."

"Is that really so?"

Godou nodded as Yuri's eyes widened in surprise.

"Uh yeah. Pretty much the type of 'rascal' who cannot stop as soon as they get worked up. Immigrating to Brazil on a whim, for example; going missing in the Amazon basin; striking it rich overnight in the black market after a war and then turn dirt poor entirely through his own fault; planning to become a monk at a monastery in the mountains but somehow end up wandering to Shanghai; as well as playboys who could sweet talk women as naturally as breathing..."

"Well..."

Yuri was greatly surprised to learn about such misconduct in the Kusanagi family which were seldom mentioned due to their scandalous nature.

"Pretty much cases of that sort. Wasting their vitality unnecessarily, causing trouble to the people around them."

"Now that you put it that way, I guess it really does describe you rather well, Kusanagi-san..."

"Ugh!"

Having offered his honest opinion, and to have Yuri respond in such a way, Godou felt like a chunk was being torn out of his heart.

Had the previous statement been said by Erica, at least he could easily retort back "Someone who causes even more trouble to others has no right to say that!" But this time, the speaker was Yuri.

The honest truth, as spoken by this high-class young lady's forthright lack of pretense, was like a stab in the heart.

Seeing Godou in low spirits, Yuri's gaze showed sympathy.

"K-Kusanagi-san, since you realize you need to reflect carefully, then this just about concludes things? Let us end the conversation at this point..."

"No, that's not enough. I have to free myself from this vicious cycle."

Godou gritted his teeth and resolutely raised his head.

"Mariya. You must speak more strictly. Using that horrifying pressure of yours!"

"B-But even if you ask me to do that... Ah I got it."

Seeing Yuri bow her head awkwardly then suddenly looked up again, Godou's hopes were raised.

"You got something!?"

"Yes. I forgot something important."

Yuri's tone became stern and serious. Apparently, she finally recovered her past condition.

Godou stood straight as he waited for the Hime to reprimand him -- and even urged her in encouragement.

"I understand. Please say anything you want without reservation. I will accept them all completely!"

"Then I shall not hesitate. This is about Erica-san."

"Eh, you're going to talk about that!?"

Being attacked in an unexpected direction, Godou was greatly shocked.

"B-But isn't now the time for reflecting about my battle with Athena? The matter of Erica isn't really the main point."

"You did say you would accept anything I wanted to say, Kusanagi-san."

Yuri's sharp gaze focused on Godou as she spoke.

That expression, gaze and tone of voice of hers were filled with the stately solemnity of a noble princess.

"Or perhaps you feel guilty about certain areas, and therefore could not bear to listen humbly to opinions regarding the issue of girls and lovers' relationships?"

"No, I don't have issues with girls and lovers in the first place!"

"In that case, why do you feel you need to avoid the topic!?"

Hence--

During this sunny day on the weekend, before the plum rain season was about to begin, Godou endured Yuri's merciless tongue lashing regarding the issue of "this past week, whether he had resolutely refused bodily contact with the woman who claimed to be his lover." As if paying penance, he was sweeping the confines of Nanao Shrine at the same time.

Finally, the lecture and the sweeping ended after thirty minutes or so.

"T-Thank you, Mariya... Your various lessons have been firmly engraved in the depths of my heart now..."

"N-No, I should apologize instead. I have said some rather impertinent things."

Godou expressed gratitude with an exhausted tone of voice, causing Yuri to panic.

"Besides, the one who should express thanks should be me. Thank you very much."

"Eh? What did I do?"

"Did you not help me sweep?"

Reminded by Yuri, Godou was taken aback.

He did not consider such a task worthy of being thanked.

Seeing Godou like this, Yuri smiled. This was a cute smile akin to a blooming cherry blossom, completely devoid of the stern oppressive pressure just now.

Instead, she was showing a consoling smile towards Godou's absentmindedness.

Godou felt embarrassed by her gentle expression.

She was truly a kindhearted girl with a heart of gold. True, she was inexperienced in worldly matters and liked lecturing a bit too much. Furthermore, she was a high-class young lady who was quite strict on Godou's misconduct. Nevertheless, her sense of responsibility brought out that inborn aura of nobility of hers.

Even though Godou only started dealing with her recently, his experiences throughout the battle against Athena fully convinced him of this fact about Yuri.

That's the way she was. Whether strict or gentle, Yuri's qualities were unbelievably impressed upon his inner heart.

"By the way, there's something slightly strange here."

As Godou and Yuri organized the cleaning equipment in the shrine office building, he brought this up.

"Normally, other than miko a shrine should have priests present, right? But other than you, Mariya, I haven't seen anyone else. Though I get the impression that someone passed by and gave me a quick glance."

He had visited Nanao Shrine a few times already. Godou suddenly brought up this question that had bothered him.

Presented with the question, Yuri displayed an expression as if she had difficulty answering.

"Ah... That is because."

"If it's inconvenient for you to answer, then I won't pursue it any further."

"Ah, no. That is not it. It is simply difficult to say out... In actual fact, apart from me, all the other people are hiding to avoid Kusanagi-san."

"Eh?"

"After all, it is the arrival of the Devil King and monarch who slew a god -- the great Campione. Everyone is rather terrified of that."

"I see..."

Godou's spirits were further depressed. He had a feeling it was not simply reverence but reasons like "terrifying" and "a taboo existence that one should not have contact with."

"Ah! Of course, I would never do that."

Yuri frantically added this last sentence.

"Although I imagined all sorts of things before I met you and was convinced you were a terrifying person, after encountering you for the first time, somehow I immediately knew that was not the case."

Godou recalled his first meeting with Yuri.

In the beginning, she treated him with great respect and her attitude was quite cautious. However, starting from a certain moment, she suddenly expressed strict disapproval of his behavior. Perhaps it was Yuri's power of spirit vision that had seen through Godou's true nature during the brief time they interacted together.

After putting the cleaning equipment in order, Godou glanced at the clock on his cellphone.

It was not yet 1pm. Godou had originally made an appointment to go out together with Yuri as well as a third person. Since the meeting time was 2pm, there was still some free time left.

Godou suddenly felt uneasy.

"That Erica, who knows if she got out of bed properly?"

"It is already afternoon, normally I would expect things to be fine?"

Yuri smiled wryly but Godou shook his head.

"No, that girl is particularly weak in regards to rising out of bed. From what I've heard, it is not surprising for her to sleep till noon on weekends."

This was what he had learned from Erica's assistant and personal maid, so it should be accurate. Because the person Godou and Yuri were waiting for was Erica Blandelli.

The whole thing began from a request Erica made a few days ago.

"Hey Godou, it is only appropriate that I expect you to accompany me around Japan seeing that it is my first time here, right?"

Hearing that, Godou was shocked.

"But clearly your Japanese is completely fluent?"

"That was simply learned through a mage's basic education. Familiarity with all the languages of the world is a requirement for all followers of Hermes. I have also been to the Chinese mainland many times and even stayed in Hong Kong for a substantial period, but I've never been to Japan before."

Naturally, Godou's second answer to her request was affirmative.

But if he were to spend time with her alone, he would have to face her overwhelming passion.

Hence, he hoped to bring along a third person if possible. Who knew if Erica would generously accept an additional person if it were Yuri? But no matter what, Erica herself did mention to Godou before, "Please develop good relations with Mariya Yuri."

Hence, after making his suggestion to both Erica and Yuri, it resulted in today's appointment.

"Well, fine. Rather than mock you for attempting to escape from a private date between two people, I will respect your courage in taking on the challenge of having a lady on each arm."

"If you two were to go sightseeing alone, it really would be worrying. Perhaps Tokyo would be met with unforeseeable danger, and furthermore, I would feel uncomfortable if Kusanagi-san were to fall to Erica-san's seductive charms..."

While one of the girls displayed surprise as she teased, the other expressed her concern for local peace and offered commentary on Kusanagi Godou's poor reputation...

There was still time until 2pm.

But feeling worried, Godou took out his cellphone to make a call. Not Erica, but the girl who managed the Blandelli home.

'Ah, it's Godou-san?'

Arianna-san's voice responded. She was the girl who was employed as Erica's assistant and personal maid.

"Excuse me, just in case I had to confirm this, has that girl Erica gotten out of bed yet?"

'I'm sorry, she has not woken up yet. Last night, Erica-sama went out until very late and only went to bed at dawn.'

"...Seriously. What the heck was that girl doing the night before our appointment?"

His worst fear turning out to be true, Godou sighed.

Nevertheless, Arianna replied in a cheerful voice.

'Hoho, please rest assured. Today's appointment is at 2pm, is that correct? No problem. Even if Erica-sama continues to sleep, I will carry her to the car and deliver her over to Godou-san. I will make sure she arrives before the appointed time, please wait.'

Getting Erica out of bed was quite a difficult task. When getting up, her usual talent and intellect was nowhere to be found. Instead, she would refuse to get up, acting like a young child.

...As a side note, if one were to ask why Godou knew this about her.

That was because he went to pick her up every morning to go to school. Because Arianna was unable to wake up her willful mistress, Godou resorted to this in order to prevent Erica from being late for school.

Hence, that was the reason why Arianna had presented the "deliver her over by car even if she continues to sleep" statement.

"You don't have to do that. I'm coming over right now to get Erica to get up!"

Godou declared as if yelling.

Although he was currently talking to a girl that was on his good books, at the same time, she was also someone in possession of driving skills that he would like to keep off the road as much as possible. This knowledge was what compelled him to offer this alternative solution.

Godou ended the call and looked up, his gaze meeting with Yuri's.

"As expected, Erica is dallying after all. I'm gonna pick her up."

"In that case, let me come along."

"Eh?"

"After all, we are going out together afterwards. This way we can avoid wasting extra time, right?"

Yuri suggested with a smile. Hence, Godou accepted graciously.

In actual fact, their original plan was to depart from Nanao Shrine in Shiba Park and set off for the area of Tokyo Tower and the Meiji Shrine.

In that case, switching locations would be a wiser choice. Erica's apartment was situated in the Hongou district in the Bunkyo ward. Having decided to visit tourist attractions in that area, Godou and Yuri headed towards Erica's residence together.

Little did he know, this act was akin to digging his own grave...

"I never knew that Kusanagi-san went as far as to rouse Erica-san from her slumber every morning..."

As he walked beside Yuri, Godou listened in trepidation as she spoke with a sigh.

Two hours had elapsed since they left Nanao Shrine together.

Along with Erica, they were now located in the shopping street near Sensou-ji Temple in the Taito ward.

A row of ten stalls were selling local products, little trinkets and roadside snacks. This was a tourist destination in the Bunkyo ward where foreigners new to Japan would be taken to.

Godou and Yuri were walking side by side along the shopping street.

Because today was an afternoon on a holiday, there were many people and it was quite crowded.

Erica toured the shopping street with quick, light steps as if she enjoyed this taste of traditional Japanese culture. She tried on a Shinsengumi jacket that was being sold at a stall, pulled out a toy Japanese sword to play around with, and even put on a geisha wig.

Following behind her were the two Japanese, Godou and Yuri.

Yuri sighed slightly, making Godou feel apologetic.

"That girl Erica, if we left her alone she would have slept all the way, completely unaware she was going to be late."

"Concerning this point, Kusanagi-san, I am actually wondering if you are spoiling her too much with your intimate care. Although you informed the household beforehand, you did enter a girl's bedroom without any hesitation, you know? And with Erica-san dressed in that particular manner."

When the two had visited Erica's apartment, the mistress of the house was elegantly enjoying her afternoon nap.

And just as Arianna was hastily trying to rouse her from bed, she went:

"No. Without Godou whispering words of love by my ear, I shall continue sleeping here."

Godou seemed to hear Erica murmur something like that.

In response, Godou went "How could she say something so outrageous when everyone else is waiting for her?" and rushed into the bedroom. Then Yuri said "K-Kusanagi-san, need I remind you this is Erica-san's -- a girl's room!" and frantically followed along.

Wrapped in a light down blanket, Erica was sleeping blissfully.

Only after Godou angrily pulled away her blanket did he realize a certain fact. That Erica, who liked to wear little when she slept, had taken off the t-shirt she wore to bed last night in place of pajamas, leaving only a pair of panties on her person--

"Seriously... Kusanagi-san really is 'absentminded' to an excessive degree!"



"T-This is the first time she is dressed like this!"

"In other words, you are very clear on the fact that Erica-san always wears little when she goes to bed every night? In that case, Kusanagi-san's behavior really is too rash."

"R-Right, I cannot refute this point."

Scolded, Godou began to feel disheartened. How many times has he been reprimanded today now?

Yuri seemed to have thought the same thing, and she relaxed her expression after a brief sigh.

"Let us leave it at that. After all, we came to go out and have fun."

"I-Is that so? I'm really sorry."

"Hoho. Today's lecture has finished?"

Erica returned with perfect timing. Apparently, she had been silently observing the two of them just now.

"So, it's about time to go enjoy ourselves. To commemorate Erica Blandelli's long term relocation to Japan, as well as wonderful fate which has brought the three of us together."

"Fate?"

"Yes, that's correct, Yuri. If we did not encounter one another in the first place, then today's group would not exist. Shouldn't we do something to commemorate our mutual encounters?"

Erica explained cheerfully in response to Yuri's surprise.

Her tone of voice was glamorous and clear as always. Erica's childish behavior when getting up was completely gone. Smiling with a chuckle, she took Yuri's hand as a knight would take a lady's.

"That store over there looks interesting, let's choose some suitable clothing for you, Yuri."

Erica cast her glance towards a store that rented outfits out to foreign tourists as she spoke.

"Eh!? I have to wear it too!?"

"I was thinking if we took a photo, that would be perfect. Recording our memories in this manner is not a bad idea."

Slightly aggressive but not very forceful in actual fact, Erica led the conservative Yamato Nadeshiko towards the crowd.

With some hesitation, Yuri followed as she held Erica's hand.

As a side note, they were both currently wearing Jounan Academy's female school uniform. Godou had heard earlier that Yuri had gone to school during the morning for a gathering of the Tea Ceremony Club.

Seeing her dressed like that, Erica went "Well, then I'll wear that too" and wore her uniform as well.

Watching them from behind, Godou suddenly had a notion. In appearance, the two girls seemed to be partners on a school trip, a pair who were very close friends.

Erica with her extroverted personality and Yuri with her serious character.

Godou believed the two were rather incompatible in this regard.

Nevertheless, Erica was very open-minded and tolerant despite her tendency to do things as she pleased. On the other hand, Yuri appeared passive but was unexpectedly resilient. In this regard, perhaps the two of them might be quite compatible after all.

--Erica and Yuri, what sort of relationship would they develop in the end?

The two girls' conversation drifted into Godou's ears as he fell into deep thought.

"So, to think you would attempt to teach Godou what was truly the right path... Yuri, you have an unexpectedly persevering spirit. I offer you my heartfelt praise and admiration."

"I-I only wish that Kusanagi-san could act with a little more caution..."

"That said, this is Godou we're talking about, you know? Through the battle with Athena, you should probably have understood, he is a person who cannot be stopped once he explodes out of control, right? Furthermore, he completely ignores minor details."

"That truly is... Indeed it is as you say."

"Putting it positively, he is very adaptable to situations. More tactlessly put, let me see--"

"Goes with the flow, is that it..."

"Yes. That's true indeed."

"B-But even though he really is rather troubling to others, I still believe in Kusanagi-san."

"Yuri, you must be a believer in the fundamentally benevolent nature of mankind. I like that sort of innocence about you. However, what about the person in question, how about Godou?"

At some point in time, the two girls had started commenting on Kusanagi Godou's character flaws.

From an outsider's perspective, the two girls appeared to be getting along amiably as they conversed. However, all Godou could feel was apprehension.

If the two of them became close friends, would they unite in a single front to start criticizing and making trouble for me in unison?

...Never in Godou's wildest dreams would he expect his prediction to come true in the near future, with even two more members joining in.



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